

'Flying Minutemen'

Stand Ready to Defend Homeland

Best known for search and rescue, the Civil Air Patrol is poised to play a crucial role in defending the home front.

BY MAX MACAULEY

Ready to help in America's homeland defense is a little-known civilian auxiliary of the Air Force called the Civil Air Patrol (CAP). It includes 3,000 volunteers who pilot their own planes.

Having distinguished themselves during WWII in defending America's shores, what are CAP volunteers doing today? What role can CAP play in thwarting terrorism? How will it fit into homeland defense plans?

CAP pilots perform four peacetime missions: search and rescue, disaster relief, assisting law enforcement and providing cadet training for young people ages 12 to 20. The young cadets learn leadership skills, and many who take flight training later become civilian and military pilots.

With congressional approval of the Homeland Security Department, CAP will add homeland defense as another important mission. CAP will carry out airborne reconnaissance of isolated areas, borders, remote landing fields, coastal zones, power plants, ports and harbors, bridges, roads and highways to identify suspicious activity.

In addition, CAP members also will provide training in: civil defense, first



A group of Civil Air Patrol senior members consult a map prior to a reconnaissance training exercise. CAP volunteers will supplement their traditional roles with a new mission—homeland security—beginning this year.

aid, terrorist threat indicators and preparations for nuclear, biological and chemical threats.

Originally conceived in the 1930s by aviation advocate Gill Robb Wilson, the first CAP volunteers were organized on Dec. 1, 1941, just a few days before the first sneak attack on Americans that fateful day at Pearl Harbor.

Honoring the Sacrifices

These days, defending his country comes easily to northern California resident Steve Taylor, 43, a typical CAP volunteer pilot. A career state government employ-

ee, Taylor has been flying since he was 16. He joined CAP as a cadet when he was 13 or 14. He flies his own four-passenger single engine Cessna, mostly carrying out search and rescue missions.

Taylor says nearly half the CAP pilots he knows are Air Force veterans. "We're expecting to play a major role in the new homeland defense plan when it's approved," said the family man with two children. "We're looking forward to it."

CAP pilots like Taylor are among today's "Flying Minutemen" and women, serving much like their predecessors during WWII. In those days,